

# CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

## **What is Cryptosporidiosis?**

Cryptosporidiosis, often called “Crypto”, is an infection of the intestines that affects both humans and animals. Some infected persons may have no symptoms but can be a source of infection for others. Person-to-person transmission occurs and can cause outbreaks in child care centers. Spread can be controlled if good hand washing procedures are followed. Crypto outbreaks in child care settings are most common during late summer/early fall (August/September) but might occur at any time.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Frequent, watery diarrhea and low-grade fever are the most common symptoms. Other symptoms may include abdominal pain, weight loss, nausea and vomiting. Some persons may show mild symptoms or have no symptoms at all. This diarrheal illness will generally go away on its own. An unusual feature of crypto is that some people seem to get better only to have the diarrhea come back in a few days. Symptoms can come and go for up to 30 days, but usually subside in 1 to 2 weeks. Crypto can cause severe illness in persons with compromised immune systems.

## **How is it spread?**

Because Crypto is in feces, anything that gets contaminated by feces can potentially spread the parasite. As a result, the parasite can be spread directly from person-to-person, through contact with contaminated objects (eg., toys), or swallowing contaminated food or water (drinking, swimming or wading pools, water tables). The spread of Crypto is highest among young children who are not toilet trained and their caregivers (those who change diapers).

## **Diagnosis and Treatment:**

A lab test is used to detect *Cryptosporidium* oocysts in the stool. Treatment is available by prescription, but healthy people who contract crypto almost always get better without any treatment.

## **Exclusion Guidelines for Child Care:**

Staff or children with diarrhea (2 or more watery stools within 24 hours) should be excluded from child care until they are free of symptoms for 24 hours.

## How can the spread of Crypto be reduced?

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. All children and staff should wash hands upon arrival, after diapering or using the toilet, before serving or eating food. Children should be observed and assisted with hand washing when needed.  
*Note: Crypto is not killed by alcohol gels or hand sanitizers so these are of little use in controlling an outbreak.*
- Reinforce good diapering practices:
  - To minimize the spread of infection, staff involved in food preparation should not change diapers.
  - Separate diaper-changing areas from children's play and food preparation areas.
  - Use disposable gloves and change them after each diaper change.
  - Clean and disinfect diaper changing surfaces between children.
  - Use disposable paper over diaper changing surfaces in addition to disinfecting and change the paper after each diaper change.
  - Ensure children wear clothing over their diapers to reduce the opportunity of leakage.
  - Wash hands: both yours and the child's after each diaper change.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces. Because Crypto is resistant to chlorine bleach it is tougher to kill than most disease-causing germs. The usual disinfectants, including bleach solutions, have little effect on the parasite. An application of hydrogen peroxide is the most effective. No disinfectant is guaranteed to be completely effective against Crypto, however, hydrogen peroxide is more effective than standard bleach solutions. Use a 3% hydrogen peroxide solution and let it sit on the surface for 20 minutes\*\*.  
*\*\*This solution is for facilities that have staff or children with confirmed cases of Crypto. This is not for general disinfection in child care.*
- Notify the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department Communicable Disease program at 402-441-8053 if you have 3 or more children and/or staff with diarrhea within 1 week.

Crypto is a reportable disease and you should contact the health department if you have a confirmed case in your facility.